

LITERARY NOTES.

There are few things stranger than the obsession of which a literary man will become the victim when he happens to "discover" something, to stumble over some author, some "school," about which his contemporaries are not, in his opinion, sufficiently informed. Here Mr. Nisbet Bain, who rejoices in Danish and Norwegian and other difficult tongues, proclaims in "Cosmopolis" that the number of novels and poems published in Scandinavia is relatively greater than the number published in either France or Germany. That impresses him immensely and he continues thus: "Equally remarkable is the excellent quality of most of the work produced." On top of this he tells us what his unfamiliar, remarkable writers are like, and before he knows it he has tacitly informed us that they are an unceasing lot of decadents, that even the healthiest romantic school is tainted with the grossness which pervades Scandinavian literature. He talks about "that illustrious trio, Bjornson, Ibsen and Lie." Why "illustrious"? And why rise up to exploit with paeans of adoration a literature which you have to admit is dissected at its source? Simply because when you have concluded that your goose is a swan it is your duty to cram the same hallucination down the throats of your friends. Hence Mr. Nisbet Bain's great industry and ardor in a task that is exasperatingly vain. No one wants to know anything further about his genuses, for every one who has looked into the subject knows its unsavory and disintegrating character.

The Sorbiers have included among their juvenilia this winter a work which it will be gratifying to see in a new edition. This is Mrs. Dodge's story of "Hans Brinker; or, the Silver Skates," a captivating little production which differs from most books of its kind in that it is written in a manner calculated to really preserve it for many years. There are over a hundred illustrations by Mr. A. B. Doggett in the new edition, the result of a special journey in Holland made by the artist.

The last number of "Blackwood's" contains a deplorable reply to Mr. Lang's charges against "Maia," in the pages of his recent "Life" of John Gibson Lockhart. To traverse the quarrel in detail is impossible here, but it may be said that the writer makes a plausible case, and nearly proves that it was not old "Ebony" who deliberately forced Lockhart's pen "into the wild and wayward quibbles, mostly fun, but on several occasions pure perversity and mischief, for which it is impossible to give any reason." We say "nearly proves" because that both Mr. Lang and the writer in "Blackwood's" are tempted to argue with a trifle too much cocksureness. An impartial observer feels that they are both right and both wrong; that a good deal is to be said on both sides, probably more in Lockhart's favor than otherwise, but that a strict apportionment of the responsibility is one of those things that not even time, patient time, can ever hope to arrange. Certainly it will never be arranged in such a way as to please everybody. In the mean time the little passage at arms between Mr. Lang and the inheritors of "Ebony" serves to increase the gayety of nations.

Little, Brown & Co. have issued a new edition of Grimm's "Life of Michael Angelo." It is richly illustrated, and in its two handsome octavo is well worth having. Grimm is a writer of no particular graces of style; he is a little crotchety, a little too convinced that aesthetic wisdom will die with Germany; but he is a conscientious historian of his subject, and while his book will always need to be read in the light of more recent publications, such as Symonds's important work, it will never lapse among the quite invalidated studies. The translation by Miss Bunnett is simple and sympathetic.

The forthcoming year of "The Century Magazine" will be distinguished by several important serials. Dr. Weir Mitchell's novel, "Hugh Wynne, Free Quaker," will gain in interest through having plenty of authentic history added to the romance. General Horace Porter's recollections of Grant prove in their opening chapters that they are the more valuable because the author's personal enthusiasm and point of view illuminate and enrich his history. Then, between these two substantial contributions, there is to be a series of papers ministering purely to delight, a series composed practically of engravings by Mr. Cole and annotating text by Professor Van Dyke. Having engraved the masters of Italy and the Low Countries, Mr. Cole turns his attention to England and inauguates his new series with a plate after Hogarth's "Shrimping Girl" in the National Gallery, which is a masterpiece of tone and texture. Altogether "The Century" promises well for 1897, there being many other excellent things besides those we have named.

Hamerton's fragment of autobiography, with a memoir filling out the record of his life, has been published by the Roberts Brothers. It is a pretty octavo of nearly six hundred pages, in type none too large. Signor Audit's "Reminiscences" have also come out, from the press of Dodd, Mead & Co. They are voluminous. Mrs. Fields' papers on Longfellow, Emerson and other "Authors and Friends" have been brought out in book form by the Houghtons. All these books are welcome.

We only have a cordial greeting for such urban and interesting essays as Mrs. Fields has written. A biography of Hamerton has been needed. Nevertheless, the mountain of this kind of literature which is produced every season is getting to be more and more appalling.

There are new novels by the thousand, there are new histories, new all sorts of books. But the new "recollections," either by the man himself, or his relatives, or his friends, or those who "knew him" outnumber all the rest. Some of the books are worth while. The number of those that are impudent, superfluous, worthless, a dozen other obnoxious things, it would be painful to state. To name them would be even more painful. For so often they are in celebration of the most estimable people, estimable and dull to the point of stupa. When will discretion take hold of the memoirist?

The Macmillans publish immediately a volume which, if it fulfills its promise, should be of the deepest interest to Americans. It is called "On Many Seas; the Life and Exploits of a Yankee Sailor," and its author, F. B. Williams, is said to have put many of his own experiences into the book, narrating them in a vein of simplicity and forcible idiom which takes away all traces of sophistication and leaves it a book like Dana's "Two Years Before the Mast," a book that is pure enjoyment. May the new work prove all that it promises to be. The literature of the fore-castle is slender enough, after all, yet it ought to be extensive; for there is nothing more fruitful in inspiration than life in a sailing vessel on long voyages. Mr. Williams's adventures date from a time now passing, from voyages in ships now being superseded by steam, but the main elements of his theme can never be lost. Sea life is sea life, and will remain a fascination in itself no matter whether we sail in wooden vessels or iron.

NELSON AND TRAFALGAR SQUARE.

A COMPLAINT IN LONDON—ADMIRAL GERVAIS IN DANGER—NEW FOREIGN SHIPS.

The recent celebration of the anniversary of Trafalgar in London has brought out a complaint from admirals of the great column erected to the memory of Nelson, surmounted by a colossal figure of the hero, facing the Strand. The protest is against soldiers' monuments or statues displacing the noble fellows at Trafalgar, and demanding that Trafalgar Square be devoted to the memory of those who took part in the battle whose name it bears. It is also declared that Nelson should be removed from his lofty plinth, and be placed down where the people may have a closer look at him; i.e., that he should not be "mastedhead," as were the naughty middies in early navy days, or punished for some gross indignity, or that might offend the admiral's wife. You see, out of mind Nelson's wife, and then insist that he should be brought down from aloft and be put on a quarter-deck, and that the statues of Hardy, of Collingwood, of Blackwood, and other heroes be grouped about him. On the other hand, there are those who believe that Nelson deserves a high place, and that there is no stronger reason for bringing him down than there is for bringing Napoleon down from the Vendome Column in Paris.

The French Navy came very near losing one of its most popular and talented officers recently.

Admiral Gervais, commandant of the Mediterranean Squadron. The squadron was having manoeuvres, and was at anchor and "gun-tube" practice, the latter referring to "gun" practice in that, instead of adding unnecessary wear and tear to the life of the gun, the shells were fired with firing-screws, smaller balls were fired from the guns or, rather, from the practice tubes inserted into them. The battle-ships were moving in single file, about one-twelfth of a mile astern, a target for the cruisers to fire at. Orders had been given that the cruisers should not fire unless at an angle sufficient to insure safety from the battle-ships. Notwithstanding these orders,

a hall of bullets suddenly fell on the deck of Admiral Gervais' flagship, the *Bretagne*, which came from Norway, and the torpedo cruiser *Vauvert*, and near the place where the Admiral had been standing only a few minutes before.

After various trials the authorities of the German Navy have decided to fit many of the largest war vessels with apparatus for partly heating their boilers with oil, and it is proposed to provide for the use of liquid fuel in all new constructions. The oil to be used in the Germany Navy is a product of distillation of lignite, a lignite tar oil, called "masnut," being a dark-brown fluid of oily nature. It will be stored on the vessel in special tanks from which it will be conducted to the furnaces through pipes, will be heated in a spray system, and will yield bright flame without smoke. One of the drawbacks in its use is that it is admitted to be very inflammable, and if a projectile should set fire to a tank the danger is great, for the oil is highly explosive. Its heating value is greater than that of coal, and the absence of smoke are advantages which are claimed to outweigh the objections.

An Italian inventor has constructed an apparatus which he calls a "Methyloleum sphere," and by means of which he professes to be able to descend to any depth in the sea. He proved this in a recent experiment at Spezia, but he was unable to get the thing to ascend. He stored about 2,000 cubic feet of compressed air in the apparatus, and then, with two friends, it was lowered to a depth of some thirty feet. Nine hours passed, and at the sphere did not reascend to the surface, and the two went up hanging by ropes, and when the door was opened the inventor was found with a face pale and partially paralyzed. The two friends were found. They had been under water about eighteen hours. The inventor says that the failure in this instance was due to the fact that the air pressure was insufficient to expel the water ballast.

The French Navy is to have a new third-class cruiser, to be called the *Estrees*. She is to be wholly of steel, 365 feet long, and 2,500 tons displacement. An unusual feature of the new vessel is that she is to be fitted with three light masts for some auxiliary sail power.

The results of the extended series of trials made with liquid fuel on the Yarrow water-tube boilers of the Russian torpedo-boat *Vryburg* having been reported in every way satisfactory, it has been decided, and orders have been given, to fit all torpedo-boats with the necessary appliances for the burning of oil.

The Japanese Government has decided to build four coast-defence ironclads, four first-class, three second-class and two third-class cruisers. Two of the second-class cruisers are to be built in the United States—one by Cramp & Sons, at Philadelphia, and the other by the Union Iron Works, San Francisco. They are to be 350 feet in length, 48 feet beam, 17½ feet draught, and 20½ knots speed. Japan has also in contemplation the construction of twenty-three first-class torpedo-boats and fourteen torpedo-boat destroyers.

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